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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: AKASHI STRESSES NEED FOR POLITICAL SOLUTION AND
GOOD GOVERNANCE IN VISIT TO COLOMBO

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In his January 22-25 visit to Sri Lanka, Japanese Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi stressed the need for a political solution, protection of the civilians from ongoing military operations in the North, urged an improvement in law and order and an end to the climate of impunity. Akashi expressed particular concern about growing civilian casualties as a result of fighting in the North. Noting estimates that more than 100 civilians have been killed in recent fighting, Akashi lamented that both sides appear to have been responsible for shelling of positions inside the no-fire zone recently created by the government (the LTTE by firing from within the zone; the GSL by responding). Akashi found President Rajapaksa preoccupied with two provincial council elections scheduled for mid-February and then general (Parliamentary) elections that have not yet been scheduled, and expressed hope the President's short-term agenda would not overshadow these important longer term considerations. End Summary.

Trip to East and North

¶2. (C) Summarizing his trip to eastern Sri Lanka and then to Vavuniya, Akashi found Eastern Province Chief Minister Pillayan to be "overwhelmed" with his tasks and desperately in need of more resources. As with other visitors Pillayan pleaded with Akashi to persuade the GSL to devolve more power and resources to the Eastern Province. Akashi also expressed concern to Co-Chair Ambassadors about the security situation in the east where 200 have been killed in the last three months. In Vavuniya, Akashi met with UN and NGO staff as well as government and military representatives. He appealed to the government to allow the UN greater humanitarian access and the ICRC greater flexibility in conducting urgent medical evacuations from the North. He also expressed Japan's concerns about on-going threats from paramilitaries in Vavuniya, particularly the EPDP and PLOTE. Akashi expressed particular concern about growing civilian casualties as a result of fighting in the North. He said NGOs estimated that more than 100 civilians have been killed in recent fighting. Akashi lamented that both sides appear to have shelled positions inside the no-fire zone recently created by the government.

Little Forward Movement in Colombo

¶3. (C) Akashi characterized his discussions with the President and other GSL officials in Colombo as useful. He related that he recognized recent military progress (but did not endorse the military action as some GSL-controlled press had reported). With all his interlocutors he emphasized the need for greater political reforms, more inclusive democracy and better protection of human rights. On the latter point, he pressed the government to conclude the

Presidential Commission of Inquiry's consideration of the killing of 17 aid workers in Muttur and the separate killing of 5 youth in Trincomalee. He also emphasized the need for the government to abide by its pledge of zero civilian casualties in military operations. On political issues, Akashi said he urged the government to not fan Sinhalese chauvinism and instead work with Tamils in the North and East to find measures so they can feel included. He said he told all of his interlocutors that democracy consists both of majority rule and full minority rights.

President Preoccupied with Short Term Agenda

¶4. (C) Ambassador asked if the President had made any specific commitments regarding elements of a political solution. Akashi responded that the President mentioned the importance of organizing elections in the north, implementing the 13th Amendment, continuing the APRC process, and possibly creating a second Chamber of Parliament. But Akashi admitted he found the President preoccupied with two provincial council elections scheduled for mid-February and then general (Parliamentary) elections that have not yet been scheduled. Akashi commented that he hoped the President's short-term agenda would not overshadow these important longer term considerations. Japanese Ambassador Araki added that the President also had discussed devolution of some police powers to the provinces.

¶5. (C) Asked for more details on his discussions with the President about preparations to accommodate the 230,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) now trapped in the North by fighting, Akashi said the President had been impressed with the relief villages that he had toured in China after the earthquake. The President expressed the GSL's intention to set up three such villages in Mannar, Vavuniya, and Killinochchi (note: this is the first we have heard of such a

concept but will endeavor to get more details). Akashi expressed his personal concern that government camps were not yet ready to accommodate a large influx of IDPs from the north. He also expressed concern about the recent breakdown of law and order in Colombo and cities like Vavuniya that affected the safety of civil society, IDPs and others.

Akashi Press Conference

¶6. (C) In a press conference later in the day, Akashi: underlined the importance of a political solution and urged President Rajapaksa to expedite the APRC and the implementation of the 13th Amendment; stressed that the climate of impunity must be rectified as early as possible; and said that once law and order is restored and good governance structure built, Japan would be prepared to consider assistance in the north, ideally in cooperation with international financial institutions and other donors.
Blake